

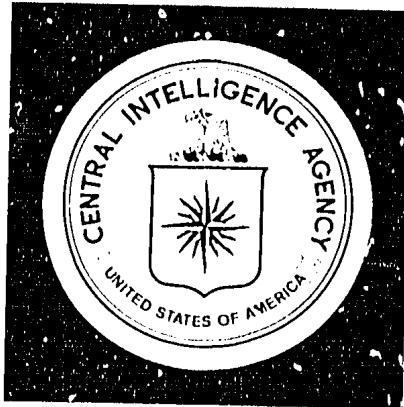
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## *Developments in Indochina*

State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

*(Information as of 1500)*

LAOS

Souvanna will not press for removal of Chinese road-building crews in his negotiations with the Communists. The government is trying to draw Communist forces away from Route 13.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The World Peace Conference, originally organized to condemn US Vietnam policy, may be canceled because of lack of interest.

SOUTH VIETNAM

The Communists are streamlining their military command in the highlands.

CAMBODIA

The situation around Romeas continues to deteriorate.

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LAOS

Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma will not seek the withdrawal of the Chinese road-building force in northwest Laos in his negotiations with the Lao Communists. According to a sensitive state department cable, Souvanna recently told French officials in Vientiane that he would discuss the road-building with Peking sometime later this year, but that the discussions would not be in the context of the 1962 Geneva Accords, which forbids the stationing of foreign troops in Laos. Souvanna added that his government is not interested in taking action to stop the road work because the system being constructed is "basically useful" to Laos, and he suggested that he would be willing to treat the road construction as Peking's response to previous government requests for economic aid.

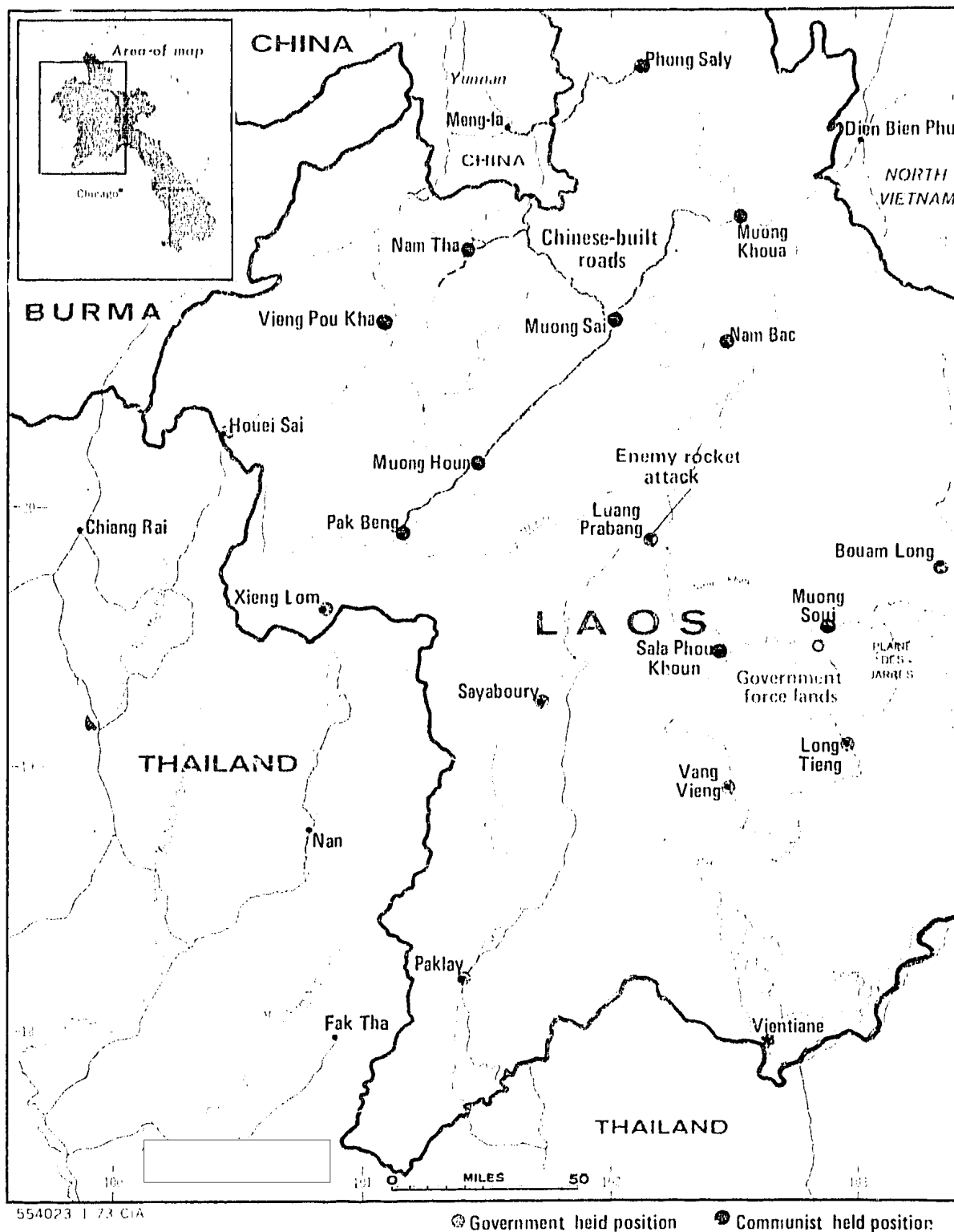
A large number of Chinese personnel, including a security force of infantry and anti-aircraft troops, is still in northwestern Laos. A route running from the Yunnan border south to Pak Beng on the Mekong was completed in mid-1972. Recent photography reveals that improvements are being made along this roadway, but that no effort has been made to extend construction beyond Pak Beng. At the beginning of the present dry season this past fall, construction was started on two spur roads near the China border, but it apparently halted in mid-November.

Souvanna, who recently returned an ambassador to Peking, has been showing keen interest in obtaining Chinese assistance in solving the Lao conflict. His apparent willingness to accept a continued Chinese role in northwestern Laos shows his desire to avoid compromising his improving relations with Peking.

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[REDACTED]

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Action in the North

In the first phase of a government operation to retake the Sala Phou Khoun road junction, a 1,000-man irregular force landed some five miles southeast of the Communist logistic base at Muong Soui. The irregulars met little opposition in their first few hours on the ground and plan to move north to attack enemy units around Muong Soui. Government commanders hope that Communist troops will pull back from Route 13 to defend Muong Soui and that Lao Army troops will then be able to push into the Sala Phou Khoun area from the north and south.

On 18 January, Communist gunners fired a barrage of 34 rockets into the Luang Prabang airfield. The rockets caused no casualties, but cratered the runway and damaged one aircraft. The attack, like the one on 18 December, was probably designed to disrupt air operations at the royal capital and almost certainly does not presage a major ground attack. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The international conference of anti-war activists--dubbed the World Peace Conference--which was to be held in Italy in late January or early February appears to be in danger of cancelation. When Hanoi first urged anti-war groups from around the world to meet in Rome last December, it was for the purpose of condemning the US--both for bombing North Vietnam and failing to reach a cease-fire accord with the Communists.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

The Communists have created a new division headquarters to streamline the command and control of existing units in the western highlands. Documents and a prisoner report indicate that the reorganization, which began last year, put the North Vietnamese 28th, 66th, and 95B regiments under the direct command of a newly formed 10th Division Headquarters.

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[REDACTED] In addition to its three infantry regiments, the new division has at least nine support battalions, and there are some indications that it has also taken over several artillery battalions from the North Vietnamese 40th Artillery Regiment and one sapper battalion from the 400th Sapper Regiment. All the subordinates of the new division have been active on the Kontum-Pleiku Province battlefield for some time and do not, in themselves, represent an additional threat to government forces there.

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The new division is under the over-all control of the Communists B-3 Front, which directs all enemy military activity in the highlands. The B-3 Front also controls the North Vietnamese 320th Division, which moved into the highlands in 1971, and several other smaller units. The first indications of the creation of the 10th Division appeared in late October, suggesting that the Communists wanted to make these organization modifications prior to an anticipated cease-fire.

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[REDACTED]

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CAMBODIA

The situation at the former government training camp at Romeas northwest of Phnom Penh continues to deteriorate. [REDACTED]

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Communist troops breached government defenses on 18 January and occupied some buildings in the center of Romeas. The morale of Cambodian forces is very poor. Losses have been heavy in a series of strong Communist attacks that began over two weeks ago, and efforts to resupply the garrison by air have been only partially successful. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Government air strikes in the area have met with little apparent success. The 200-man Cambodian contingent that was moved by helicopter to within a few miles of Romeas on 16 January has been completely dispersed by the Communists, and other government relief forces moving overland toward the beleaguered garrison continue to make slow progress.

In the south, three government paratroop battalions from Takeo finally linked up with Cambodian troops at Svay Prey on Route 2 on 18 January. Although the paratroops met no resistance when they moved into the village, they later withdrew. Other paratroops just north of Thnal Totung on Route 2 are still bogged down a few miles from that village, and Phnom Penh is reinforcing them with a squadron of armored personnel carriers. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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